



SOUTHERN LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE

**STAR** TRANSFORMING GOVERNMENT

## WEST VIRGINIA'S FEED TO ACHIEVE PROGRAM

Through the Feed to Achieve Act signed into law in April 2013, West Virginia's *Feed to Achieve* program addresses the three-fold problem of food insecurity as it relates to child poverty, health and education. Implemented by the Office of Child Nutrition and building on existing state and federal nutrition programs, the *Feed to Achieve* program seeks to provide a minimum of two nutritious meals a day to schoolchildren in West Virginia by way of innovative meal delivery systems. The program also incorporates innovative funding mechanisms, including directed donations and targeted federal grants, that enable the program to operate with negligible administrative cost, providing children with free meals.

Food insecurity is a persistent problem in West Virginia, where many students cannot afford or access healthy meals outside of school. Child hunger has several negative effects on children's health and ability to learn. Without access to healthy meals, children experience nutrient deficiencies and are at high risk for obesity. They have limited ability to pay attention in class, earn lower grades, and have increased risk of behavioral problems associated with lowered social skills, increased anxiety and aggression, and increased risk of tardiness and absenteeism. The *Feed to Achieve* program responds to these



problems by requiring schools to provide students the opportunity to eat breakfast. Since its enactment, 75 percent of schools in West Virginia have started innovative breakfast programs such as grab-and-go breakfasts, breakfast in the classroom, or breakfast after first period. In the year the program started, school breakfast participation increased 5 percent statewide, from 37 percent to 42 percent — a difference of about 40,060 students.

The Department of Education funds these additional meals in partnership with county education boards, collecting public and private tax-deductible donations, grants, and bequests toward special-purpose Feed to Achieve Fund accounts. Every county education board in the state has a fund. The state Office of Child Nutrition also directs federal funding to reach school districts with the greatest needs. This combination of revenue resources allows 330 schools in 38 counties to offer free breakfast and lunch to every student.

The *Feed to Achieve* program also encourages partnerships between coun-



Richard Goff, Executive Director, and Kristy Blower, Nutrition Coordinator, of the Office of Child Nutrition, West Virginia Department of Education, at the 68<sup>th</sup> SLC Annual Meeting.



ty education boards, agricultural agencies, and gardening and farming communities to provide students with additional access to healthy, locally sourced foods, and teach them about farming, nutrition and cooking. Half of all county education boards have since implemented farm-to-school partnerships, using these resources to source local ingredients in school meals, build school gardens, offer culinary classes and take farming field trips.

By building on existing state and federal nutrition programs and looking to the community for support, the *Feed to Achieve* program provides a creative and flexible solution to a multifaceted problem. While each community is able to shape their program to suit local resources and needs, continuous data collection and evaluation by the Office of Child Nutrition shows that the program has successfully increased availability of healthy meals to children statewide.